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New York Young Republican Club.

Opportunity and responsibility

[New York]

[1915]

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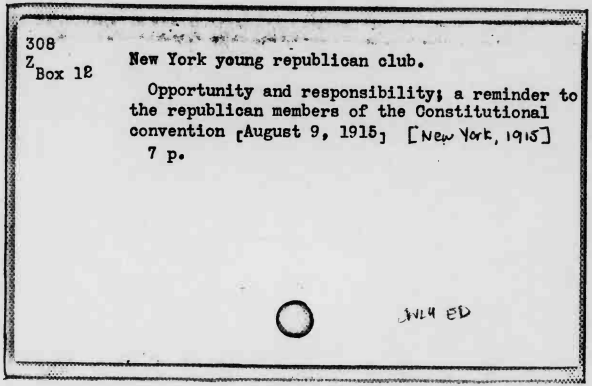
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New York young republican club.
Opportunity and responsibility; a reminder to the republican members of the Constitutional convention [August 9, 1915] [New York, 1915]
7 p.
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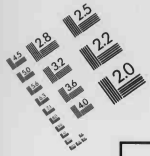

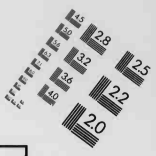

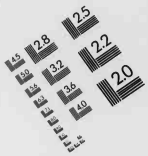

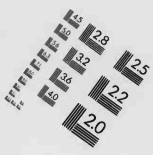

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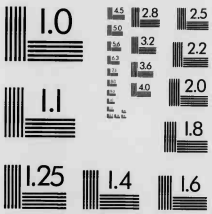

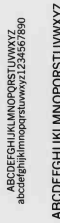

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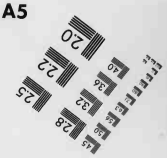

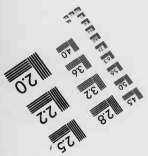

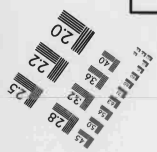

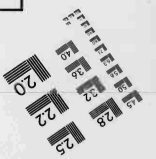

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OPPORTUNITY AND RESPONSIBILTY

A REMINDER TO THE REPUBLICAN MEMBERS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION.

I.

Although narrow partisan considerations should have no influence upon the action of the Constitutional Convention, the overwhelming predominance of the Republican party in the membership of that body is an unalterable fact which cannot be ignored. One hundred and sixteen of the delegates were elected on the Republican party ticket, and only fifty-two on the Democratic. The Republicans include the majority of the leaders of the party. It would be a sham to pretend that they were elected on a non-partisan basis and merely happen to be Republicans; their Republicanism was the cause of their election. The Republican party has been entrusted by the people of the State with the task of reframing the Constitution. We do not wish to minimize the able contributions to the work which the minority members are prepared to furnish and are in fact furnishing, but it is the Republican leaders and statesmen comprising the majority of the convention upon whom, by reason of their position and the vote last fall, the responsibility for the proposed constitution will rest. A good constitution will for a long time redound to the credit of the party, while a poor one, even if accepted at the polls, will react against it as time makes known its defects. The responsibility is, therefore, a party responsibility of the highest political character. The delegates must not act as partisans, but the party will be judged by the manner in which they perform their service to the State.

II.

The Convention holds a commission to improve the Constitution of the State in accordance with the needs and demands of the times. The political movements and controversies of the past few years, however misguided and ill-advised some of them have been, have voiced the vigorous insistence of the people for better government. The sincerity and depth of this demand cannot be denied. The improvements sought are chiefly along the line of fixed responsibility, increased efficiency, and greater assurance of justice and fair treatment. To this end there is a demand for more responsible and efficient executive machinery, more responsible and efficient legislatures, more efficient work by the courts. After the turmoil has subsided, there remains a desire to place and keep in office men who are not merely honest, but who are experienced, expert and responsible administrators. In order to accomplish this, there is also a demand that the connection between the will of the electorate and the concrete results of government be made and kept straight and clear, rather than devious and obscure.

III.

There are about half a dozen specific matters in which the people of New York, as citizens of the most populous and highly developed state in the Union, demand improvement now. They are (1) more consistent and responsible executive policy; (2) legislatures that give more attention to important questions and less to local, special and trivial concerns; (3) surer and quicker administration of justice; (4) business-like management of finances, including taxation and appropriations; (5) home rule for cities, and incidentally, (6) freedom to develop the most effective method of selecting elective officers. In our judgment the citizens of New York will not long be satisfied with anything but a bona fide compliance with these demands.

IV.

It is not intended to develop an extended argument on these matters here. Our main purpose is to remind the Republican delegates as forcibly as we are able of the responsibility that rests upon them as Republicans, and of the opportunity for unique patriotic and party service. The specific matters referred to have been expounded frequently and fully. A brief summary is all that we shall attempt.

V.

Executive Efficiency. This means more complete unity of policy by a co ordination and consolidation of State departments, boards and commissions, and a more direct responsibility of their heads to the governor and through him to the citizens of the State. It means essentially the short ballot, in order that responsibility may not be divided and the voters left uncertain whom to criticise or commend. The short ballot, as applied to the state executive, means the election at the polls of the governor and lieutenant governor only, the other state officers now elective to be appointed by the governor. Executive efficiency means also a closer co-operation between the governor and the legislature by according him the right to introduce bills and take part in debate in person or through his department heads. This will make the governor in fact as well as in theory the leader of his party, and establish "visible government."

It does not follow, however, that the Constitution should irrevocably fix all the departments of the State government; on the contrary many of them should be left to legislative development as experience may dictate.

All proposals to select civil servants with reference to military experience or other irrelevant considerations, or to reward military sacrifice at the expense of the civil service are utterly incompatible with the demand for increased efficiency in public officers and employees.

VI.

Legislative Efficiency. This means further prohibition of special and local legislation, such as special bills for the hearing of private claims and amendments of city charters, work which must of necessity be done either ignorantly or with a vast and impractical outlay of labor. It means also securing more experienced legislators through longer terms and increased compensation. The result will be greater dignity attaching to the office of member of the legislature.

VII.

Judicial Efficiency. An important reform in this connection is freedom of the courts to develop simple and elastic rules of procedure in place of the technical and complicated codes now in force through legislative enactment. There should also be ensured a speedier determination of litigation through limitation and simplification of appeals. Finally, the selection of the best qualified judges should be rendered more certain, and the courts liberated from any suspicion of political bias. In our judgment this can best be accomplished through the appointment, instead of the election, of the judges of the Supreme Court and of the Court of Appeals, a change that has met the approval of many of the leading members of the convention. Improvement could also be made through a separate ballot for such judicial officers as are to be elected. On the other hand, complete degradation of the local administration of justice would result from such a suggestion as that to elect by districts the police magistrates in New York City—a benighted proposal which would destroy the increased esteem which the Magistrates' Courts have been winning in recent years.

VIII.

Financial Matters. The Finance Committee of the convention has reported provisions on the subject of the state

debt, sinking funds and serial bonds, which deserve favorable consideration. Of at least equal importance is the establishment of a state budget system under which expenditures are correlated with revenues, and the amounts to be appropriated for the ordinary operations of the government are to be determined by the executive branch without power of increase by the legislature. An excellent proposal on this subject has also been reported by the Finance Committee.

IX.

Home Rule. This is a form governmental efficiency working through regulation of local affairs by those who understand the local conditions and must live under them. It means a grant of the power of local self government and at the same time protection from interference by the legislature in local affairs. Its proper scope does not in any way limit the power of the State in regard to matters of state concern, or create a local independent sovereignty. Perhaps with respect to no other subject under consideration by the Convention is the popular demand more widespread or better founded than in respect to this. This demand has made itself felt and has been liberally recognized in several important states where new constitutions have been recently adopted; but the problem of New York, with her larger and more numerous cities, is especially pressing. It cannot be met in a narrow spirit. With due regard for the interests of the State in matters of state concern, the grant of power to adopt and amend charters must be broad, and must not be so hedged about with reservations and technicalities as to be nullified in operation.

X.

Nominations for Elective Offices. The experience of the past few years shows that no entirely satisfactory method of nomination has yet been devised. We are still in the experimental stage. The convention system gave rise to abuses and

became unpopular. Two forms of direct primaries have been tried and have caused complaint. Some kind of statutory regulation of nominations is necesssary to prevent fraud. No doubt both the direct primary and the convention systems can be improved. The subject is one of vital importance, and one in regard to which the electorate will continue to take an interest until the problem is solved. In respect to judicial candidates especially new methods of nomination have been discussed, such as automatic designation for the primary and automatic renomination, together or separately, and also designation for the primary and nomination of candidates by the governor. Under the circumstances, the subject clearly should not be treated in the constitution which, as stated in the Republican State Platform of 1914, "should embrace only matters involving essential and and permanent political principles and constitutional limitations." We believe that the convention would be guilty of action both shortsighted and unpopular if it attempted either to regulate nominations by the Constitution or to forbid their regulation by the legislature.

XI.

The points that have been emphasized have no element of radicalism. They tend to conserve representative government, not to sweep it away. Nor are they new. The Republican party committed itself to the short ballot and to budget reform at the Waldorf conference held at New York City in December, 1913. Most of the other matters here dealt with were incorporated in the state platform adopted in Saratoga in August, 1914. To repeat, the opportunity and responsibility of acting on these matters belongs at present, by the vote of the people, to the Republican party. Neither the credit nor the blame for the action to be taken can possibly be placed anywhere else. By meeting the public demand fairly and intelligently, without sham or superficiality, the Republican delegates will illustrate

the high statesmanship of which the great men of our party have so often shown themselves capable.

Dated *August 9, 1915.*

NEW YORK YOUNG REPUBLICAN CLUB,

ALBERT S. BARD,
ORION S. CHENEY,
ALFRED C. COXE, JR.,
HARRY A. CUSHING, *Chairman*
GEORGE S. FRANKLIN,
ISIDOR GREEWALD,
WILLIAM W. HOPPIN,
SAM. A. LEWISOHN,
EZRA P PRENTICE.

Committee on Constitutional Convention.

ROBERT MCC. MARSH, *President.*
CLUB OFFICE:
15 BROAD STREET,
NEW YORK CITY.

END OF
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